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Do universities need a new enlightenment? (Part 1)

Thursday 18 September 2025 11:20 (1 hour)

A common misconception about universities is that they are entirely objective and humanistic institutions. By establishing racial classifications and the basis of racism in modern science, the Enlightenment contributed significantly to the dehumanization of a large part of the human race while elevating another group. Furthermore, it was not originally intended that science and higher education would be accessible to everyone. While some progress has been made in inclusion and antiracism, universities remain challenged to overcome their racist history and heritage. Claims of “race neutrality” and colorblindness, meritocracy, research biases, publication database biases, and surprisingly, even an equal opportunity policy focusing on women overlook certain groups of individuals who struggle to achieve academic and professional success under extremely challenging circumstances. Regarding racism, the university does not sufficiently fulfill its knowledge transfer mission, both within its own institution and towards society. Recent developments in the USA are a reminder of how fragile antiracism policies at universities are, even after centuries.

The workshop will examine the interconnections between centuries-long postponements of frank debates on racism, power imbalances, and the impact of racism on society at large, and discuss recommendations for the future.

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Session Classification: Workshops